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## LIBRARY SERVICES IN WESTERN SAMOA

Western Samoa (Samoa i Sisifo) is a small independent island state in the South Seas. The approximate land area is 1,050 square miles, the approximate population 135,000 and the islands have a record, in spite of their small size and relative isolation, of often in the past being a centre of argument between great powers. Today Western Samoa, entering its fourth year of independence, is faced by the problems of a rapidly rising population, declining exports and poor markets for such products as cocoa and copra on which, together with the banana export trade to New Zealand, the whole economy depends. This economic situation naturally forces its attention on the Librarian, who, already faced with an extremely small budget, is likely to find it becoming even smaller.

Library activities in Western Samoa are centered on the Nelson Memorial Public Library which is the public library for Apia, Western Samoa's only town and the capital and seat of government. The pleasant modern building, which is well suited to tropical conditions, was opened in late 1960. Stamp collectors may be interested to know that the Library is depicted on the current 3d. stamp of Western Samoa. Before this building was erected, a library was housed in various temporary premises in the town. The opening of this building—which commemorates the late Hon. O. F. Nelson (Nelesoni Ta'isi), 1883–1944, Samoan leader, businessman and patriot—on 5 November 1960 represented a truly big step forward in library service in this country. The Nelson family gave the land on which the Library stands and some of the cost of the building, while grants from the Western Samoan and New Zealand governments provided the balance for building and books. As there is no municipal local government in Western Samoa the Public Library is administered as a division of the Education Department, the Senior Librarian being responsible to the Director of Education. There is also an active advisory Library Committee which meets every two months. This Committee has

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proved to be a very valuable element in library development in Samoa.

The Library, which is situated in the middle of Apia, right on the sea front and in quite close proximity to the Chief Post Office and larger stores, covers 5,037 sq. ft. of which 930 sq. ft. comprise a mezzanine floor. Louvre windows are placed above and below the fixed wooden shelving which, although not entirely satisfactory, had to be installed for reasons of economy. It is interesting to note, however, that the small amount of New Zealand manufactured steel shelving used in the library has not been an entire success. It has rusted badly and is cumbersome to shift and difficult to erect. In my experience of tropical library conditions, admittedly limited to Samoa, wooden shelving is the only answer. There are numerous design faults and errors in the construction of the building and in most cases, such as shelving fixed to walls, it is not easy to overcome these mistakes even if we had the money to do so. The library operates a free service for children and students, that is, any person enrolled in a government or mission school who can produce proof of such enrolment, and includes students of the teachers' training college and the theological schools run by various missions. At the present time we have 7,139 of these children/student members and it is true to say that at least 6,500 of these are active borrowing members, a fact that strains—and at times completely overwhelms—our small, inadequate book-stock and staffing.

Adult membership is still regrettably on a subscription basis and before the purists condemn us for this let me say that there is little hope of gaining overall free library service in a country where no one pays rates, there is no income tax for the majority of the local population and especially where there is no free and compulsory education for children. There are, in fact, very many children in this country who are not receiving any education. We try to keep the adult subscription as low as possible; at present it is five shillings a year. This subscription is certainly not something to be proud of but frankly I do not know what alternative I could suggest that the authorities would be likely to adopt at the present time.

Besides myself, the staff is made up of six Samoan girl assistants. The sight of these attractive young women in Samoan dress with flowers in their hair often makes male visitors envious of my job; it is pleasing to report they are efficient as well as decorative.

The senior assistant has had six months' in-service training and observation in New Zealand libraries and is now working through Part 1, Paper A of the N.Z.L.A. Training Course. The assistant in charge of the children's and young people's department has just returned from a similar trip to New Zealand and it is hoped that she, too, will take the course.

Wear and tear on books is very great. I estimate that with children's books we can only expect half the life of similar books in a New Zealand library. This, together with damage, loss, illegal removal,

overdues and failure to return at all, is to be expected in a developing nation. It is no use worrying too much about this; I seem to remember the National Librarian of Ghana saying much the same thing in an article in the *The Library World* and experience here, on a much smaller scale than Ghana, of course, bears out his opinions. One can only hope to keep matters under control as much as possible, while seeing that the library is well used.

An important function of the library here is to provide a place for people to do homework and to study. I think, perhaps, that in this sort of situation, where there is little at home in the way of facilities for reading or private study, the library's most important function is to serve as a reading room and information centre. We provide 70 seats with table space; on most afternoons and evenings these are fully occupied, with people waiting to take any seats that are vacated. An attractive feature of the library is an open air reading terrace where thirty people may read and study.

Bookstock comprises some 16,000 volumes. Here, I should like to pay a tribute to my predecessors, all librarians from New Zealand who, in selecting and ordering the original bookstock, did a fine job of work.

It is obvious to me now that I should have concentrated more on the children's library and spent less on the adult section, although the situation does not look so much out of balance at present as it did a year or so ago since there is a growing—and this year quite spectacular—increase in the use of adult books. This is largely accounted for by the return to Samoa of a number of Samoan graduates who have now taken up teaching and other positions and also by the large increase in the staff of experts and instructors/advisers on the United Nations Technical Assistance Board mission in Western Samoa.

As is fitting for a library close to the burial place of Robert Louis Stevenson, an attempt is being made to have the best possible collection of Stevensonia. Then we have quite a small though comprehensive collection of books and other material on Samoa and the South Pacific. We have the beginnings of a photograph collection on Samoa and a fairly complete newspaper file going back to 1901 when the German occupation began.

As an independence gift, the United States of America gave Western Samoa two fine bookmobiles. These vehicles, each of which is equipped with its own generating plant and a 16 mm film projector, make three complete circuits of the two main islands of Upolu and Savai'i each year. The government has never found itself able financially to have both these vehicles staffed and in operation at once so I have devised a system whereby we do a circuit of Upolu calling on all schools and villages with road access (and some where we carry our books, generating plant, films and projector by Land Rover, by boat, or even on foot); then park the first vehicle, pack up books and all equipment, cross to Savai'i by ferry, load the



second and set off again. In this way we do three complete circuits of the country a year. The whole scheme, of course, has its roots in the bookvan operation of the New Zealand Country Library Service to which it bears many similarities. However, we show films at each call besides issuing books; usually an educational film programme of one to two hours is shown at each school visited as well as changing books. As there is no electric power outside Apia, this is often the only chance children have of seeing films. In the main our calls are confined to schools, though the evening film show is usually given outdoors where it is common to have 800 to 1,000 people present.

Three calls are made each day. Because of the language problem and also because of the few books available in Samoan we are not able to do much in the way of the provision of books for adults who cannot read English. However, wherever there are a few people who want books and there is someone responsible to take charge of them we have established small library stations similar to Country Library Service "B" libraries. These little library groups looked after by Samoan medical officers, the police inspector on the island of Savai'i, and others, seem to be quite effective. We have established ten of them so far. A new endeavour just begun is the lending of 100 books at a time to a mission theological seminary.

We act as the film library for the Department of Education, receiving loans of films from the New Zealand National Film Library for lending to schools and other institutions. We get excellent service from the Film Library and much use is made here of the films supplied.

We are now receiving limited inter-loan facilities from the New Zealand National Library Service. Last year School Library Service of the National Library Service lent us 300 books; these have proved a boon.

From the British Council and British Information Services and from the United States Information Service we have received valuable, appreciated and continuing assistance.

The Apia Film Society has its regular screenings at the Library and public lectures on a variety of subjects are held at irregular intervals, the best attended so far being one given last year by Dr Roger Green of the University of Auckland on Samoan pre-history. Exhibitions of the work of local artists have been hung in the library; one is being shown at present and last year we displayed work done by pupils of the new technical school.

The Teachers' Training College at Malifa, Apia, is the Government school in Samoa with the best library. This library, which was largely set up with assistance from the British Council, is staffed by the first Samoan girl to gain the Certificate of the New Zealand Library Association. The Department of Agriculture has a reasonable collection of books in its own field as has the Apia Observatory. A small collection of reference papers and books of the Legislative Assembly are kept at the Public Library.

In conclusion, I should add that nearly three years as Government Librarian in Western Samoa do not constitute three years' beach-combing in the tropics. Something, I hope, has been accomplished, but in spite of all the help we have received much yet remains to be done.

FOOTNOTE: AMERICAN (EASTERN) SAMOA

Eighty miles to the east lies the colony of American Samoa consisting of the island of Tutuila, Manu'a Islands and various small islands. This is an unincorporated territory of the United States and is administered by the Department of the Interior. Recently, American Samoa has become the centre of an all embracing educational television network designed to cover the neighbouring islands as well. A librarian known as the Territorial Librarian is employed. There is full free service and a bookmobile service. The Territorial Librarian and I have arranged an interloan scheme and it is hoped to continue and improve the cooperation between the Libraries of the two Samoas.